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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: THE IRAQI COUNCIL OF REPRESENTATIVES: AN
INSTITUTION STILL IN DEVELOPMENT

REF: A. COR REPORT 2/5/2008
[B](#). COR REPORT 2/13/2008
[C](#). COR REPORT 4/26/2008

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and
(d)

[1](#). (C) Summary. The Iraqi Council of Representatives (CoR) held its first session on March 16, 2006, and since then, has developed into a working democratic institution. Speaker Mashadani and Deputy Khalid Attiyah are increasingly pressing CoR members to adhere to the CoR by-laws, but hiccups in legislative procedure still remain. The voting process needs improvement, particularly to address cases of narrow votes. Absenteeism among members also often results in a lack of quorum and loss of productivity. Stature, power, and party affiliation of a committee chair directly impact its productivity. Patronage and nepotism prevail in hiring staff. The USG -- through the National Democratic Institute (NDI), International Republican Institute (IRI), and the Embassy's Office of Constitutional and Legislative Affairs -- is providing technical assistance to improve these capacity challenges. Now two years old, the CoR and its leadership will need to improve its productivity as well as its reputation with the Iraqi people as a democratic institution.
End Summary.

LEGISLATIVE PROCEDURE

[2](#). (C) Legislative procedure in the CoR is woefully lacking. The biggest problem is that no CoR member knows what will be discussed the next day. According to the by-laws, the CoR's agenda is to be prepared two days in advance. The CoR's General Director for Media Mohammad Abubaker, told PolOff, however, "This has never happened, not even once!" The CoR Presidency Council comes to an agreement on the agenda the morning of the session, which is supposed to start at 11:00 a.m., but instead starts at 1:00 p.m. or 1:30 p.m. Committee heads receive little (or no) notice regarding whether legislation from their committee will be read on any day. It is also common for a first or second reading to be skipped over, simply because no one on the committee was informed or prepared. Sometimes the CoR leadership jumps around on the agenda without any announcement, leaving members confused regarding the next topic. Legislation is also read with typos -- or even the wrong draft -- which occurred during the second reading of the amnesty law on February 5, 2008 (ref A). Speaker Mashadani and Deputy Speaker Attiyah are just now beginning to adhere more strictly to the CoR by-laws, by asking that statements be submitted in advance and by criticizing ill-prepared committees.

THE VOTING PROCESS

[3](#). (C) The voting process in the CoR is democratic -- but not very accurate. When a vote occurs during the session, members quickly raise and lower their hands within seconds. However, they do not do this in unison, making it virtually

impossible for the rapporteur (a member appointed to record the minutes and votes) -- or anyone else -- to tally the voting with any precision. Although an electronic voting system is in place, the CoR staff who manage the equipment insist members will not use it because they do not want their vote "tracked" and do not trust the staff. Although some votes are unanimous, the votes on the provincial powers law, in particular, illustrate why a better system is needed. Specifically, a dispute over a close vote on February 13 (when the law passed) on an article regarding the elections deadline (October 1, 2008) ignited violent protests. In this situation, Mashadani and Attiyah made a "quick" decision to declare the provision passed, in accordance with prior political agreement, to ensure passage of the bill (ref B). One way the CoR could ensure greater transparency is to make each member stand and then sit as their vote is counted.

ABSENTEEISM OF MEMBERS

14. (C) Absenteeism in the CoR is a large problem, particularly since 139 members are required for quorum in order to hold a vote. The political parties also use the issue of quorum as a form of protest (i.e. walk-out). Some CoR members "sign in," but then leave to sit in the cafeteria (or depart the building) before the session starts. Naser Rubaie (Sadrist Bloc Leader) is one of the biggest offenders. Many of the key bloc leaders (i.e. Abdul Aziz Hakim, former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, former Prime Minister Ibrahim Jafari and Saleh Mutlaq) refuse to participate in CoR sessions. Instead, they defer their authority to other CoR members in their bloc. Mashadani and Attiyah, however, are

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now less bashful about shaming members regarding their absentee record. In a particularly egregious example of absenteeism, one CoR member is said to be a full-time resident of Iran. During the final votes on the provincial powers law, 2008 budget, and amnesty law, Speaker Mashadani threatened to dock the salaries of those who were not present and go to the media with their names. On April 26, Mashadani also publicly read off the names of those CoR members with the highest absentee records (ref C). While Mashadani does not usually follow through with his threats, his repeated steps to emphasize this issue may start to have an impact.

THE POLITICS OF COR COMMITTEES

15. (C) Power dominates the committee system. The effectiveness of the committees is dependent on leadership and on how active those members are within the CoR. The stature of the Chair, party affiliation, and relationship between the Chair and Deputy of a committee also impacts its productivity. For example, the two co-Chairs of the Economic, Reconstruction and Investment Committee Haider al-Abadi (Dawa) and Yonadam Kanna (Assyrian Christian) work well together. Legislation tends to move more efficiently through their committee as a result. Other committees, such as the Legal Committee with Chair Baha Araj (Sadrist) and Deputy Salim Jibouri (IIP) are not as well synched. ISCI member Ridha Taqi told PolOff that Jibouri is more qualified than Araj, and that Araj's lack of legal expertise slows down the committee's work. Similarly, Chair of the Governorates and Regions Committee Hashim al-Tae (IIP) and Deputy Nada al-Sudani (Dawa) often provide conflicting information on legislation (i.e. provincial powers), presumably due to their different party affiliations and loyalties.

STAFFING - PATRONAGE AND NEPOTISM PREVAIL

16. (C) Staffing at the CoR is largely based on relationships with the CoR leadership, leaving the system open to patronage and nepotism. For example, CoR Speaker Mahmoud Mashadani's

son, Abdul Basit, is his Chief of Staff. Division staff have no control in the process. The CoR's General Director for Media Mohammad Abubaker, told PolOff in late April that he has no say in selecting staff in his section. Committee staffing is not much different. Most of the staff are closely tied to the party bloc affiliation of the chair of the Committee. Even staff in the CoR's badging office -- the gatekeepers -- are affiliated closely to Deputy Sheikh Khalid Attiyah and march to the orders of Attiyah's Chief of Staff Ahmad Qurashi. The Research Directorate, modeled after the US Congressional Research Service, cannot escape sectarianism either. Saifadain Rahman, now a senior advisor to VP Tariq al-Hashimi, founded the Research Directorate (with IRI assistance) and told Poloff his intention was to staff it with "independents" to ensure professionalism and to provide unbiased analysis to CoR members. However, he said he battled the CoR leadership on this issue and lost.

COR OFFICE SPACE: RULED BY POWER

17. (C) Power rules in the allotment of office space at the CoR. Offices are organized by CoR leadership, party bloc, and committees. CoR Speaker Mashadani, Deputy Sheikh Khalid Attiyah, and Second Deputy Speaker Teyfour's Offices all naturally have offices encompassing entire corridors. Each of the party coalitions also have their own offices, with UIA and the Kurdish offices as the largest. Fadila's Office, on the other hand, is tiny. This system leaves independents with no space -- except the cafeteria. One independent CoR member Safia Souhail told PolOff she complained to Speaker Mashadani on this issue, asking for more support. The stature and power of committee chairs and deputies also dictates obtaining good office space. Prominent committees, such as the Foreign Relations Committee Chaired by ISCI bloc leader Hummam Hammoudi, are upscale and large. Committees chaired by "movers and shakers," such as the Labor and Services Committee (Abdullah Saleh - KDP) and Economic Committee (Haider Abadi - Dawa) also have decent space. In comparison, the office for the Governorates and Regions Committee chaired by Hashim al-Taei (IIP) is located on the third floor in an obscure enclave.

USG TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO THE COR

18. (C) Post has targeted programs focused on assisting the Council of Representatives. Through DRL funding, NDI and IRI have been granted \$50 USD million each to focus on political party development and democratic initiatives. Both train the

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CoR members on various strategies for moving their platforms forward. As an example, NDI said they work with Education Committee Chair Ala Makki to provide training on how to advance the committee's initiatives. The Office of Constitutional and Legislative Affairs in the Embassy also provides training to CoR members on legislative drafting and analysis, interacting with the executive branch, and right now is providing specialized technical assistance on the elections law. While the Iraqi CoR is making progress, it still needs to become more efficient. USG-sponsored training programs can help impart more basic skills and operating knowledge to that end.

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